AMERICAN JOURNAL OF
ARTS AND HUMAN SCIENCE (AJAHS)
ISSN: 2832-451X (ONLINE)
VOLUME 2 ISSUE 4 (2023)

PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

American Journal of
Arts and Human Science (AJAHS)

Volume 2 Issue 4, Year 2023
ISSN: 2832-451X (Online)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54536/ajahs.v2i4.2234
https://journals.e-palli.com/home/index.php/ajahs

Anarchy, Militancy, Transactional Sex and Homo Sacer in Samar Yazbek's *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria*

Amar Bahadur Sherma[1*]

Article Information

Received: October 28, 2023
Accepted: November 30, 2023
Published: December 04, 2023

Keywords
Anarchy, Homo Sacer, Transactional Sex, Exploitation, Displacement, and Funding

ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the complex dynamics of the Syrian Civil War, scrutinizing how totalitarianism catalyzes uprisings that lead to a multitude of consequences, including the displacement of innocent populations, the emergence of bare life conditions, the rise of militancy, and the prevalence of dissensus. The study also explores the ethical responsibility framework proposed by Emmanuel Levinas, particularly focusing on his works "Cities of Refuge" and "Totality and Infinity," which underscores the importance of responding to the call of the Other. The author offers a multifaceted analysis of Samar Yazbek's experiences in Syria, where she consistently places herself at great risk to aid fellow citizens, establish educational institutions, and empower widows. This first-hand account illustrates the dire circumstances faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to the oppressive rule of Bashar al-Assad, exposing the stark reality of their struggle for basic human needs, such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare. Finally, the article proposes potential solutions to the ongoing crisis, emphasizing the need for a political solution, international cooperation, and an expansion of the concept of "unconditional hospitality" as advocated by Derrida. The paper highlights the critical importance of acknowledging the rights and dignity of IDPs and refugees and offers a comprehensive analysis of the Syrian conflict through various theoretical lenses, including Hannah Arendt's concept of "bare life" and the potential for a political resolution. This study ultimately contributes to a deeper understanding of the Syrian Civil War and its impact on the lives of those directly affected by the conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The recent outbreak of war between Hamas and Israel has called for scholarship on war, trauma, refugees, migration, homelessness, human rights, and many more issues. Such academic discussions are perceived to lend constructive political frameworks to policymakers, stressing the importance of war-related scholarly works. According to McLoughlin *et al.* (2017) and Yazbek (2013), war profoundly influences the act of writing and the essence of a writer's identity. It suggests that during times of crises, occupation, war, and civil conflict, writers, like other members of society, find themselves taking and should be taking on various roles and missions in response to the new realities imposed upon their communities. Postcolonial psychoanalysis and trauma theories have predominantly focused on understanding how war and political conflicts affect an individual's sense of self and identity, particularly in the way these effects are represented in literature (Ward, 2015). In this context, Wang (2015) argues literature often serves as a means of expressing the trauma of war. Life-writing, including testimonial narratives and accounts of bearing witness, offers firsthand, arguably authentic perspectives on the physical and emotional repercussions of political and military conflicts. Literature on war plays a crucial role in recording history, exploring human experiences, fostering empathy, questioning norms, and promoting peace. It provides a platform for artists to express themselves creatively and for readers to engage with complex, profound narratives. It serves as a testament to the enduring impact of war on individuals and societies, offering insights and lessons that can shape our understanding of the past and our aspirations for the future. Furthermore, it serves as a valuable framework for comprehending the consequences and enduring legacies of colonial and neocolonial struggles for self-determination, dignity, and social justice (McLoughlin *et al.*, 2017).

The Arab world is presented as a complex contemporary arena for political and military conflicts. It has been marked by various colonial endeavors, civil wars, international interventions, and complex, ongoing consequences. Additionally, the region still contends with the lingering effects of colonialism and the legacy of independence movements (Ward, 2015). In this context, the contemporary Arab literary landscape has witnessed a surge in the production of diverse life-writing sub-genres throughout North Africa and the Middle East. These literary works depict the state of these nations as regions in flux and offer arguably authentic depictions of both individual and collective experiences within politically charged contexts.

Incorporating the ideas that have emanated from the scholarship above, in this paper, I argue that the Syrian Civil War, known as a proxy war, demonstrates how totalitarianism triggers an uprising resulting in internally displaced people, bare life, militancy, and dissensus; and I further argue, secondly, even in the case of emergency

[1] Department of English, University of Texas at Arlington, 1225 W Michell Arlington, Texas 76019, 414 Carlisle Hall, United States
[*] Corresponding author's email: amarsherma@gmail.com

how the core idea of ethical responsibility is derived from Levinas' "Cities of Refuge" and "Totality and Infinity". In Levinas' hospitality, one can exist if he or she responds to the call of the Other. In such a response, one is hardly worried about his/her own life. Resisting her personal urge to have a deep affection for her people and birthplace, Yazbek aims to help her fellow citizens by way of constructing schools and equipping widows with income-based skills. She routinely meets with rebels to talk about civil society, putting herself at risk to risk "the other" out of danger.

The underlying structure of this paper may be seen in its three-part argument. I will first sketch out the historical context of "The Syrian Civil War," mostly the part that depicts the factors that led to the uprising; secondly, I will flesh out the problems faced by Internally Displaced People (IDP) in Syria due to the tyrannical rule and dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad, and in conjunction with that, in the last or final section, I will endeavor to offer some possible and feasible solutions to the status quo in Syria. The overall effect that is tried to achieve in this paper is to dismantle some of the subversive analysis of Yazbek's novel *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria* and add some new dimensions by way of examining it through some theoretical lenses for its re-reading, to contribute to the overall oeuvre of Yazbek's The Crossing scholarship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The novel is comprised of three levels to narration. The first level just follows the sequential structure of the novel which is determined by Samar's three crossings to the northern region of Syria, starting with her first arrival in the summer of 2012, and ending with her last in the same season of 2013. The second level is started by Yazbek's being the storyteller of the story. "Through her eyes and skin, we discover the pain, despair, and hope experiences" (The Crossing, 2022). And, finally, the last level is that of history: the progress of the Syrian revolution. The Syrian Civil War, which broke out in 2011, is an ongoing, armed conflict of multiple groups in Syria. In other words, it is a war fought between the Ba'athist Syrian Arab Republic directed by President Bashar al-Assad, along with local and foreign allies, and several domestic and foreign forces that are opposed to both the Syrian government and each other in differing combinations. The war has led to civilian displacement and refugee exodus. "Several human rights organizations have called the Syrian Civil War the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century" (Syrian Civil War, 2020).

The novel cannot be mistaken for a book on how Syria has been plagued by the civil war but it appeals to readers to view it through literary lenses. Hussey (n.d.) opines that *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria* is not simply reportage or political analysis. It bears comparison with George Orwell's Homage to Catalonia as a work of literature. Yazbek is a superb narrator who knows how to pace her text, craft dialogue, and convey a universal sense of grief; this is how she crosses the line from journalism to high literary art. Any readers can be traumatized by reading about the harrowing experiences that countless displaced people in Syria have been undergoing for years. The Crossing is not a book you "enjoy"– it is far too profoundly horrifying, and yet from the very opening sentences" (Khalaf, 2018). As of 215, in four years, it was estimated that 230,000 people had died in the conflict. This book is an eloquent, gripping, and harrowing account of the country's decline into barbarism by an incredibly brave Syrian. (Andrews, 2015). The book does not entail data and figures much but appeals to readers' hearts through Yazbek's account of three of her trips back into her country as the civil war raged. Each time she must sneak back illegally in and out of Syria. The bulk of her time in Syria is spent in the town of Saraqeb, though she ventures into other areas as well (Philo, 2016). Brave writer and journalist Yazbek recounts her trips back to the ruins of northern Syria in 2012 and 2013 to set up small women's projects. Along the way, she bears witness to indiscriminate barrel bombing by the regime but also to the mutation of a once-peaceful revolt into a monstrous jihadi assault whose aims are repugnant and unrecognizable to secular activists such as her. Yazbek complains "The only victor in Syria is death: no one talks of anything else. Everything is relative and open to doubt; the only certainty is that death will triumph" (Khalaf, 2015). Yazbek has tried to strike a balance between the details of physical harm to citizens and the psychological effect of war on them. Yazbek's choice to unveil the collective stories behind the revolution is primarily an attempt to reclaim the agency stripped by the war. Traumatic experiences entail "the annihilation of subjectivity" (Ward, 2015) that makes individuals feel dehumanized, objectified, and unable to act or react. It is this sense of subjectivity that Yazbek attempts to regain by resisting the aftereffects of her traumatic symptoms. Sometimes, the loss of subjectivity among displaced people is overshadowed by the vivid description of horrifying physical damage in war-stricken vicinities and their narratives.

METHODOLOGY

This paper primarily will employ qualitative methodology by utilizing textual analysis of the novel and other supplementary materials like journals, book reviews, UNHCR documents, websites, etc. that relate to internal displacement, particularly in the novel, refugee rights, shortcomings of UNHCR documents, sexual and gender-based violence against girls or women, gender stereotypes, effects of such violence, possible solutions to these problems. Wilson & Sharples (2015) reveal that qualitative research methodology is concerned with the way of understanding meaning. Qualitative researchers are intrigued by the way people make sense of their world and how they interpret different events. Patton (1987) argues that qualitative data provide depth and detail through direct quotations and careful descriptions

of program situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors. Besides, the researcher uses his arguments and knowledge to develop this paper fully and substantiate the central claim. Overall, the paper is qualitative.

Bashar Al-Assad's Rise to Power

In 2000 when Bashar al-Assad was declared president and called for reforms in politics earlier, but he ultimately emulated his father's authoritarian form of government, misusing Syria's powerful military and security services to dismiss political disagreement. It is said that he did not democratize the country but made his suppression less severe. Long-suppressed internal conflict caused the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. Drought, unemployment, the wave of Arab Spring , the division between Sunni and Alawite elite, corruption and violent reaction to the peaceful demonstration gave rise to Syria's civil war in 2011. "Before the revolution, there were already weapons kicking around in the Palestinian al-Raml district. There were drug dealers, extreme poverty, and unemployment" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 91). Although there was a peaceful protest movement calling for liberty, fairness, lawfulness, and democracy, "the regime stamped out the protests with great brutality, by means of arrests and massacres – and by stoking confessional conflict. As a result, the revolution became militarized" (Gosch, 2022). Maysara, one of the voluntary bodyguards of Yazbek, "had started out campaigning peacefully against the Assad regime but had later taken up arms" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 10). An old man told Yazbek that "[they] didn't do a thing. [They] just asked for a few rights" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 33), but there was military intervention from Assad. Free Syrian Army members said "[a]ll [they] are doing is defending [themselves]. [They] are not attacking them" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 30). They had to be armed in self-defense.

There are numerous groups equipped with arms involved in the Syrian Civil War. President Bashar al-Assad leads the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). He has been reported to have received foreign support from Russian and Iranian governments. Insurgent forces that partook actively in the war include the Southern Front, and the Kurdish-dominant Syrian Democratic Forces. These armed groups have been backed up by Western powers like the United States and Germany. Moreover, regional support comes from other Islamic fellow nations: Jordan, Turkey, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Islamist militant organizations such as ISIS also stand against the Assad regime; however, they have clashed with mainstream protesters.

Thanks to God, Turkey has been a host to a substantial number of Syrian refugees, establishing itself as one of the countries with the largest refugee populations globally. As of September 2021, Turkey had officially registered more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It's important to note that this figure excludes unregistered refugees, and it remains challenging to precisely determine the exact number of unregistered individuals due to their uncertain legal status and the risk of deportation they face. The influx of Syrian refugees into Turkey began shortly after the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. However, the largest waves of refugees arrived in 2015 and 2016. During this period, northern and central Syria saw the Syrian regime, backed by the Russian air force and Iranian-funded militias, retake control of the largest rebel-held cities. The table below mirrors the major political action that took place over the decade.

Almost every human rights organization has called the Syrian Civil War the deadliest humanitarian crisis of the 21st century. "Tens of thousands of Syrians have lost their lives and an estimated 9.5 million have fled their

Table 1. Timeline for refugee waves and related political events

Dates	Major political events
March 2011	The Syrian Civil War begins.
May 2011	The first Syrian refugees flee to Turkey.
March 2012	The first refugee camp opens in Jordan, near the Syrian border.
June 2012	The EU adopts a special measure amounting to 23 million euros.
March 2013	The Syrian refugee total reaches 1 million, with Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt.
June 2014	UNHCR releases a new report saying that Europe is shouldering a small part of the Syrian refugee problem.
July 2015	Official U.N. figures show more than 4 million Syrian refugees in total.
March 2016	The EU-Turkey deal is signed. Turkey is to receive $ 6.5 billion to improve the humanitarian situation.
July 2016	The European parliament and commission approve a proposal to permanently increase the funding and scope of Frontex.
Dec 2019 – Jan 2020	Violence in northwest Syria displaces more than 500,000 children.
February 2022	Turkey's deputy interior minister says applications for temporary and international protection will not be accepted in 16 provinces.
June 2022	The EU gives Turkey another $ 3.6 billion to aid refugees.

homes since the war started in March 2011. Three million Syrians have now fled the country, mostly to neighboring countries Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey while another 6.5 million have been internally displaced within Syria" (Rehman, 2020, p. 50). There are "2.5 million children, displaced within Syria, the biggest internally displaced population in the World. The pace of displacement remains relentless" (Internally Displaced People, 2022). Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are not the likes of refugees. Draper (2021) quotes the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular because of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border. (2). "By 2014 a significant number of people had been killed and these included army (62,800), rebels (42,700), civilians (54,000), and 3000 from unknown nationalities. (Rehman, 2020, p. 77)

At the outset of the summer of 2012, Yazbek makes many secret and risky visits to Syria. Passing through a small hole in the fence with the Turkish border, her "feet sank into the soil and the barbs mauled" her back and "crawled across the line of separation between the two countries" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 10). However, she succeeds in getting into what can be called "Liberated Syria. "Also, she describes how Syrian women with incredible courage help their husbands keep fighting the Assad regime. Syrian women are not part of militancy; however, they make a lot of contributions behind the scenes by transporting medicine, coordinating actions, videotaping operations, and defying bombardments by way of walking their children to school through the rubble.

Totalitarianism triggers many dire consequences. Because of the absolute power of Assad, there is a clash between the Assad army and the Free Syrian Army initially. It compels or forces citizens to flee their country or take an illegal route that is full of obstacles and life-threatening situations. Yazbek, as an exile in France, enters her motherland through a barbed border, but "[t]he barbed wire lacerated" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 10) her back. She trembled uncontrollably at that moment. "Unlike the flow of Syrian refugees abroad, which has been reduced after neighboring countries closed land borders in front of refuges, the number of IDPs within the country continues to increase" (Haid, 2022). For them, safe access to healthy food, clean water, strong shelter, medical care, and other fundamental needs is a daily struggle. To make the situation worse by totalitarianism, "[t]he use of siege warfare and the restrictions imposed by the Syrian regime on humanitarian agencies, limiting their access to areas controlled by opposition groups, have led to the starvation and nutrition deficits." Yazbek is haunted by questions like "[c]offee was a commodity rarely to be found; would they even find any tea or sugar? Would there be any water to wash their faces in the morning? Was one meal going to be enough to feed several mouths? Would any of them reach the end of their natural lifespan?" (p. 51). Even their right to have basic rights is snatched by the state. Once they are "deprived of their human rights", they become "rightless" (Arendt, 1976, p. 267) within their own country. She adds there is no culture of working together for the sake of civil society. "That's why regional disputes and rivalries between blocks and groups erupt. It's a direct consequence of totalitarianism" (p. 40). "The situation isn't as it seems to you. Oum Fadi said [t]he people aren't united! There's a growing hatred between them now" (p. 76). The disintegration of society does not help in the free movement of IDPs and humanitarian corridors. It is imperative to ease the problem of humanitarian channel and protect people from dying of hunger and treatable health problems.

"The plight of the internally displaced has been well documented over the past decade. But there is still debate over whether they should be recognized as a special category of persons for humanitarian purposes" (UNHCR, 2022, p. 155). The reason is as "internally displaced persons reside within the borders of their own countries and in most cases under the jurisdiction of their own governments, primary responsibility for them rests with their national authorities" (p. 156) even if the government itself is responsible for internal displacement. This pending decision has been a major hindrance to timely support and assistance in Syria.

"A large percentage of IDPs live in makeshift camps and scattered informal settlements where security risks are rampant. Syrian IDPs face a higher risk of being abducted at checkpoints, while displaced women and children also face discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence, and child labor recruitment" (Haid, 2022). IDPs were under the compulsion to take shelter in "the building [which] appeared to be submerged in total darkness, just like the surrounding villages, but inside the occasional dim light bulb hung from the ceiling, as the school was now a shelter for displaced families" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 67). Oum Fadi said, "This poultry barn has been sheltering us for a year" (p. 76). Living in such an unhygienic condition can worsen their health. The situation of camps in Syria is poorly managed. When Yazbek and her companions drove along with the swarms of displaced people carrying their belongings and standing under the glare of the sun. Although the camp had a large generator, it was not large enough and there was no electricity at night. While there was a huge water tank, there were no services. All around she "saw was deep poverty, emaciated bodies, threadbare scraps of clothing. Groups of children played barefoot under the blazing sun" (p. 48). Especially children are deprived of their rights. There are no education campaigns for children at all. The scene is different. "Children [are] running about between the cars, hawking their wares. Aged between five and fifteen, the children [seem] to be selling just about everything you could think of: gas lighters, bread, sunglasses, cold juice, fizzy drinks, coffee

and tea" (p. 42). If citizen subjects are not happy with the status quo, "the enunciation of the subsequent rights will become a call to action: 'It is right to revolt'" (Balibar, 2017, p. 37) or "the political dissensus " (Ranciere, 2004, p. 306). Furthermore, the "logic of dissensus consists in the demonstration of a certain impropriety which disrupts the identity and reveals the gap between poeisis and aesthesis " (Ranciere, 2004, p. 2). Contrarily, "the regime bombed us [Syrian protestors], and executed nine of our [their] children right in front of everyone" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 17).

Theoretical Framework

The Assad regime reduced them to the subjected subject. In fact, Syrian citizens were treated as "homo sacer". She tells others that they are "trapped rats and that Bashar al-Assad is killing us [them] just for a laugh" (Agamben, 1998, p. 52). It is "the sovereign decision, which suspends law in the state of exception and thus implicates bare life within it" (p. 53). Even they were not qualified for their individual death rituals. There were mass graves. Regardless of their varying cultures, individual rites could not be performed. Any armed person could kill any civilians without any fault. A victim woman said that the Syrian army "killed [their]children and robbed [their] homes, but why did they need to open [her] wardrobe and throw [her] dresses out in the courtyard" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 17). There has been a state of anarchy and chaos. "Chaos was rampant and abductions of foreign journalists were also on the increase, either for ransom or to prevent them publishing the truth about what was going on" (p. 63). Arendt describes in her essay how skepticism, cynicism and hatred prevailed everywhere. "Hatred, certainly not lacking in the pre-war world, began to play a central role in public affairs everywhere," (Arendt, 1976, p. 268). "All the same, the only victor in Syria is death: no one talks of anything else. Everything is open to doubt; the only certainty is that death will triumph" (Yazbek, 2015, p.12). Even people's right to know about their death has been taken away. They cannot predict when, why and how they are going to be killed, which is a clear indication of the rightless situation and reduction of their existence to nothingness or null.

Indeed, the concept of "Sovereign biopower" aims to protect and give life to individuals based on their humanity. However, this power, which is essentially control over life, fails to grant life. Instead, it asserts its authority by using threats and taking innocent lives. Samuel explains why nation-states desire the continuation of camps, which "is designed to make durable a state that is initially conceived as temporary—the suspension of constitutional procedures in the face of a situation of 'exception'" (Arendt, 2015, p. 9). These camps, as Hannah Arendt describes them, create a situation where "anything is possible." Throughout history, the value of "bare life" has become increasingly politicized. In ancient Greece, societies were class-conscious and operated under their own ideologies to ensure the reproduction of life. This hierarchical structure classified some individuals as superior and granted them privileges, allowing them to exert control over the biological life of others in the name of bios. This hierarchy demonstrates that "biological life" is systematically controlled. In the context of nation-states, displaced people, refugees, and asylum seekers have their natural and political lives dominated by the state, which enforces different sets of laws for subjects and citizens. Unlike citizens, refugees are subjected to laws that lack the principles of equality and justice. In other words, "citizens" and "refugees" are treated as if they are from different planets and the earth is not their "common home."

Harrowing Experience of Women and Girls

In Syria, women are treated as puppets, and they are subordinated which contrasts with Aristotle's belief that man is by nature a political animal. Political discussion is important for a person's growth and development. Here, women were like slaves "whom Aristotle therefore did not count among human beings" (Arendt, 1976, p. 297). In fact, before the war and the presence of ISIS (also known as Islamic State or ISIL) and other militant groups, uncovered women in Syria were normally seen outside (Yazbek, 2015), but time has changed. Neither the Assad regime nor other armed groups provide women with political access. She continues "[i]t had been difficult to be female in a conservative society that did not allow women to rebel against its laws" (p. 10). Women are suffering a lot at the hands of Assad as well as other Syrian men. Amongst the IDPs, women and children suffer the most. On the one hand, women want to look after their children, and on the other hand, they want to stay where their husbands are fighting the Assad army, risking their lives.

As refugees, women in Syria bear the responsibility of providing the main source of income for their families. Without the support and protection of their communities, they feel vulnerable. However, this shift has also resulted in increased female autonomy and empowerment. Increasing numbers of women are taking on jobs, starting small businesses, and forming cooperatives, such as soap-making. Women also make up a significant portion of the agricultural and factory workforce in some parts of Syria. Despite these advancements, there are still limitations on the types of jobs women are encouraged to pursue, with teaching, healthcare, and craftwork being seen as more "appropriate" for their gender. Women also face barriers to leadership positions and receive unequal pay and benefits. In a southern province of Syria, female-headed households had significantly lower monthly incomes compared to male-headed households.

Women's health, including physical, mental, and reproductive health, is often overlooked in refugee camps at the cost of basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Conducting surveys on sexual harassment incidents and sexual health is challenging due to the stigma around discussing these topics in Syrian society. As a result,

women have limited access to basic healthcare, sanitary napkins, contraception, and maternal care. Birth rates and infant mortality rates are high, and women face barriers such as cost, distance, lack of transportation, fear, and shame. Therefore, it can be argued that providing food or other basic things cannot outweigh the inexpressible sufferings women refugees are undergoing.

Freedman confidently shares that many of the women refugees she spoke with recounted their stories of "violence they had experienced at the hands of smugglers, including sexual violence and also the pressure to exchange sexual relations in return for the price of their passage when they did not have enough cash to pay for this journey" (Freedman, 2016, p. 4). "Women and girls travelling alone are particularly vulnerable. Survival sex is often the only option to access food for themselves and their children. Support by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is not always guaranteed" (Davaki, 2021, p. 20). In particular, women and girls who travel alone are vulnerable, often resorting to "transactional sex" or "survival sex" (Pittaway, n.d., p. 2) as a means to obtain food for themselves and their children. They know it and are concerned about this form of abuse. Nevertheless, they are required to submit themselves to the situation. And it is not understandable on men's end. Why can't men refrain themselves from ill-treating refugee women? How can they often turn a blind eye to another fellow human's plight? Are men heartless? Is the idea of sex so overwhelming? Are men sadists by nature? Do men need a psychotherapy or strict action? Why can't anybody put an end to this ongoing inhumane conduct?

Foundation for Political Solutions

In my opinion, a single solution is not enough to stop the ongoing Syrian civil war. A political solution to the Syrian conflict is an ideal option. There are several ways through which politics could be a possible one to the Syrian war. A negotiated deal may be possible if two conditions are fulfilled duly. Firstly, both the regime and the most significant elements of the opposition would have to perceive the battlefield situation as a hopeless impediment. "Every major outside player-the US, other Western states, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Russia, and Iran and others-would also have to come to the conclusions-again simultaneously" (Rehman, 2020, p. 79). As Assad has a good rapport and inclination towards Russia, negotiations should urge the Russian government to play a mediator's role, offering it an open role in guiding a transitional process. Russia should not be labeled as an obstacle to negotiations but more as a channel of dialogue with opposing forces around Assad. Mediators should encourage the opposition to enter a political process without the precondition of Assad's departure, though assures can be given that this remains the ultimate goal in order to incentives them to accept talks to restore peace in Syria. (Rehman, 2020).

Other way-out is European nations, US or Arab states must immediately boost the supplies of non-lethal aid to opposing forces to demoralize Assad in Syria. This project should emphasize medical supplies and communications equipment. The latter will be particularly important in helping the opposition to network and unite from within the country. Continuous pressures need to be exerted on the Assad regime and its supporters to a greater degree. More sanctions should be imposed on the regime's financial base and its supporters intensively. Likewise, the United Nations as a team has to impose as many sanctions on Syria to coerce it into complying with Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State. (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" (p. 28). Apart from these, more provisions, and rules regarding direct intervention in a particular territory for humanitarian corridors for not only refugees but also internally displaced persons must be included in different UN documents. During a state of emergency, citizens should be more sympathetic, empathetic, and welcoming. Regardless of nationality, gender, caste, religion, or political affiliation, more people must break down any sort of blockade to rescue them or protect them. Most of the townspeople had knocked down the 'walls' between their homes, turning these into thoroughfares (Yazbek, 2015). Exactly like the "fall of the Berlin Wall", "when East German authorities began to allow citizens from the East to cross the border freely on November 9, 1989, it was like heaven on earth (Stephenson, 2022). The idea of the border should be avoided. During a civil war, if citizens are allowed to flee to safer places, there will be fewer casualties. Respecting the most basic principles and values of liberty and democracy, neighboring countries of Syria must not agree to the fact that it is only possible to open borders between states that are socioeconomically equal. The basic examples of this are the Schengen space with the European Union (Zapata-Barrero, 2013), India and Nepal, the U.S. and Canada. The idea of open border is already underway.

Another way to pressurize the Assad regime is to be hospitable and take ethical responsibility to help the victims "The Face of the Other." Most Syrian people are hospitable. They help people unconditionally. Every Syrian has to be guided by the principle of Levinas' ethical obligation and welcome IDPs even if their life is in peril. "Hospitality becomes the very name of what opens itself to the face, or, more precisely, of what "welcomes" it. The face always lends itself to a welcome" (Derrida, 1999, p. 21). Yazbek's team "would pass through these strangers' homes, jump out of windows or climb down ladders to street level, then slip through the courtyard carrying [their] shoes" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 12). "Before the face [he does] not simply remain there contemplating it, [he responds] to it" (Levinas, 1985, p. 88). Levinas adds the Other faces me and puts me in question and obliges me. We cannot ignore someone's plight. (Levinas, 1969). All Syrian people must rise above their religious sects, factions, political beliefs, stereotypes, etc. and feel obliged

to help "the Other" (displaced people). "Abu Khaled used his body to conceal [Yazbek], acting like a protective shield from bullets" (Yazbek, 2015, p. 77). Syrians should realize that one cannot exist without helping the needy. Let us see what the townspeople did and continue doing for hospitality in Syria. Mohammed told Yazbek that they needed to "check the shelter near Saraqeb market that we were planning to turn into a women's center. The shelter wasn't in an ideal location, but the space was available, and the townspeople had offered to let us use it for free, so it was a good start" (p. 60). Such generosity and unconditional hospitality among people can heal the wound of displaced people. Derrida's proposal of "unconditional hospitality" can be appropriate to grapple with the Syrian war. Many civilians could not cross the border in time. As a result, either they had to be killed or be internally displaced within Syria. In this case, Derrida sounds justifiable as he says hospitality or a right to hospitality must be at the core of cities of refuge. He wants to ask "new cities of refuge to reorient the politics of the state . . . transform and reform the modalities of membership" (p. 4) so that they can unconditionally host or provide refugees, stateless people, asylum seekers with hospitality without asking them to agree with terms and conditions or imposing restrictions on them. According to him, such cities of refuse must retain their ancient sovereignty of Greek poleis. Many cities in Europe and America have officially pledged to offer some form of sanctuary to refugees and stateless people. It is not perfect; however, it keeps us thinking of room for improvement and going further. If there were some sanctuary cities in Syria, many people would not flee the country and live in abject poverty or live a pathetic life in their motherland.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Many Turkish people have selfishly benefited from the rush of capital flowing in from Syria. They rent out their shops and homes, hike their prices and see a doubling in sales. They take advantage of Syrian refugees' situations. (Yazbek, 2015). Neighboring countries should come forward with a helping hand rather than take advantage of the situation of refugees. It is against humanity.

The solutions discussed above are based on individual theoretical lenses. The most reliable and leading organization, the UN, must play the most instrumental role in curbing the frequency of bombing, or mass killing in Syria. The decision of the United Nations to assign responsibilities to agencies/departments has the caliber to restore peace and bring smiles back to the innocent faces of internally displaced persons in Syria. "UNHCR's role in the new division of labor is pivotal because it is focused on protection, the biggest gap in the system. Indeed, UNHCR is at a critical juncture in its 55-year history, having agreed to substantially expand its role to encompass the internally displaced" (UNHCR, 2015, p. 175). The international community can help homeless and displaced people resettle and bring their lives to normalcy by providing them with some funding to rebuild their houses, schools, etc. This is going to be a long journey, but it is reality and urgency.

The recent deportations indicate that Syrians sent to Turkey are facing a growing risk of being sent back to Syria against their will. If Turkey proceeds with mass deportations as proposed by Kılıçdaroğlu, it will disrupt the EU-Turkey agreement. So far, the EU seems to have overlooked the relatively small number of forced deportations, but if Turkey escalates the policy and sends millions of Syrians back to unsafe conditions, the EU will have to acknowledge the crisis and will lose a reliable partner in managing the refugee influx into its member states. To prevent this potential crisis, the European Commission should warn Turkey that it could lose its designation as a safe third country under Article 38 of the EU Asylum Procedures Directive. Continued refoulment will also put EU refugee aid funding at risk, as it is contingent on Turkey's commitment to hosting refugees in safe and humane conditions. The European Union should emphasize the importance of protecting the human rights of refugees in Turkey through its bilateral relationship. In addition to publicly calling on the Turkish government to halt deportations and human rights abuses against Syrian refugees, the European Commission should collaborate with UNHCR to establish a third-party monitoring system. This system can determine whether Syrians leaving Turkey are doing so voluntarily or if they are being forcibly deported.

The EU should offer Turkey a longer-term framework for hosting Syrian refugees, as the possibility of safe repatriation soon is diminishing. Currently, EU payments to Turkey are sporadic and do not reflect the actual financial challenges of hosting the largest registered refugee population in the world. To discourage Turkey from resorting to unilateral deportations, both parties should agree on an annual funding commitment accompanied by third-party monitoring and an end to forced repatriation. The United States should exert public and private pressure on Turkey to prevent forced and coerced repatriation of Syrian refugees who do not feel safe returning to their home country. The upcoming edition of the State Department's annual Human Rights Report in 2022 is an important tool to convey to Turkey that the issue is being closely monitored. The 2021 report briefly mentioned "some cases" of Turkish refoulement of refugees, but the 2022 report presents an opportunity to emphasize that this problem has worsened over the past year. The United States must make it clear that its funding for the Syrian refugee crisis comes with expectations regarding the treatment of refugees by recipient countries. As the largest donor to the crisis in Turkey and the region, the U.S. donated $239 million to Turkey in 2022, giving it significant financial leverage to ensure that host countries fulfill their human rights obligations in exchange for funding. With only 39% of the U.N.'s 2022 funding appeal for the regional crisis being met, declining annual support is pushing Turkey and neighboring countries to consider unilateral solutions. The United States should reverse its

trend of reducing funding for the crisis and demand a commitment from local governments to uphold basic human rights standards for refugees. Additionally, the U.S. could use its funding as leverage to discourage Turkey from normalizing relations with Syria.

Besides the pressure, the US is expected to seek more

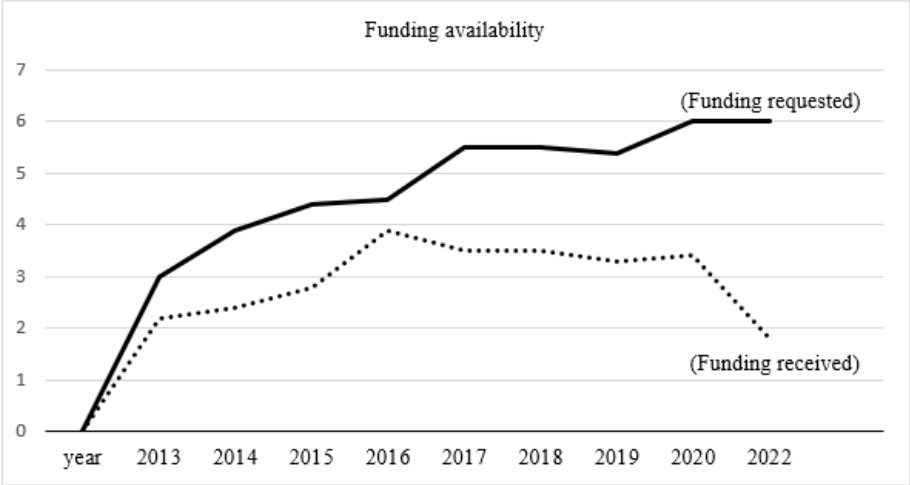

Figure 1. Funding requested for Syrian refugees and funding received (Source: UNHCR)

opportunities to show Ankara that it has no problem in becoming a partner in meeting this challenge, on the condition that Turkey abides by human rights standards wholeheartedly. The United States has already volunteered $185 million in relief funding following the earthquake in Turkey and Syria, and it should consider donating additional funds for reconstructing hard-hit cities in southern Turkey through a reliable humanitarian channel (Hickson & Wilder, 2020), as they are the places where accommodations are likely to be formed as a new excuse for the repatriation of Syrian refugees.

While both the U.S. and Turkey cannot fully address the underlying issues that pose risks for refugees returning to Syria, it is important for President Biden or the White House to actively seek out ways to alleviate these problems. This will demonstrate to Ankara the seriousness of the United States in assisting refugees to safely return to Syria in the future. In recent years, the humanitarian funding for the Syrian crisis has decreased, leading to heightened food insecurity within the country. To address this, the White House is urged to explore opportunities to enhance its own contributions and encourage other donors to follow its path.

Aside from institutional efforts and strategies, on the personal level researchers and writers might contribute to curbing the impact of wars. Discouraging wars in the world demands a multifaceted approach, and researchers and writers can be instrumental in this endeavor. Education and awareness efforts should shed light on the devastating consequences of conflict, emphasizing the human, economic, and environmental toll. They should also spotlight successful conflict resolution models and advocate for peaceful dialogue and compromise. Addressing root causes, such as human rights violations and social injustice, should be a central theme in their work, urging governments to prioritize diplomacy and international cooperation over military intervention. Promoting disarmament, early conflict prevention, and people-to-people diplomacy are essential facets. Responsible journalism and the crafting of positive narratives that emphasize the benefits of peace are vital. Advocacy, support for peacebuilding initiatives, adherence to international law, and accountability for its violations are all critical components of the collective effort to discourage wars and promote a more peaceful world.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of literature in the context of conflict, as seen in Yazbek's *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria*, elucidates the profound impact of war on individuals and societies, and the ethical responsibilities that arise in times of crisis. Being the most intelligent being on earth, we must be ready to risk our lives to save other people because nothing can transcend the religion of humanity, empathy, and unity. The paper urges everyone to contribute to criminalize such horrific wars. The Syrian Civil War, as a case study of a proxy conflict, underscores the devastating consequences of totalitarianism, internal displacement, and the urgent need for ethical responses, as guided by Levinas' philosophy. By delving into the historical factors that led to the uprising and addressing the challenges faced by internally displaced people in Syria, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted narratives and complex realities of war and conflict. It emphasizes the crucial role of literature in providing insights, fostering empathy, and offering potential suggestions or solutions to the ongoing challenges in the Arab world and beyond, emphasizing the enduring relevance of war-related scholarly works.

Acknowledgement

The writer would like to thank Dr. Shital Dahal Green, an adjunct professor at Pokhara University, Nepal, for guiding him, providing articles, and sharing his deep insights into refugee and migration theories. Similarly, he would like to express his sincere gratitude to the University of Texas

at Arlington family for their encouragement to engage in academic discourse.

REFERENCES

Agamben, G. (1998). Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life. Stanford UP.

Andrews, B. (2015). Review: The Crossing-My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria, by Samar Yazbek. The Irish Times, https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/review-the-crossing-my-journey-to-the-shattered-heart-of-syria-by-samar-yazbek-1.2303223.

Arendt, H. (1976). The Decline of Nation-State: End of Rights of Man. The Origin of Totalitarianism. Harcourt Brace & Company, 267-302.

Balibar, E. (2017). "Citizen Subject." Citizen Subject: Foundations for Philosophical Anthropology, translated by James B. Swenson, Fordham UP, 19-39.

Cheurfa, H. (2017). "From Physicality into Nothingness." Civil War, Trauma, and Identity in Samar Yazbek's Testimonies of the Syrian Revolution. *Dakam's Interdiciplineary Studies Meeting, September 2017, Conference Proceedings*.

The Crossing. (2015). Raya: Agency for Arabic Literature. https://www.rayaagency.org/clients/yazbek-samar/the-crossing/.

Davaki, Dr. K. (2021). The Traumas Endured by Refugee Women. European Union. https://rm.coe.int/ipol-stu-2021-691875-en-1-/1680a23902.

Derrida, J. (1999). Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Stanford UP.

Draper, J. (2021). Justice and Internal Displacement. Political Studies, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217211007641.

Freedman, J. (2016). Sexual and Gender-based Violence against Refugee women: A Hidden Aspect of the Refugee 'Crisis'. *Reproductive Health Matters,* 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rhm.2016.05.003.

Gosch, R. (2015). *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria.* Qantara.de. https://en.qantara.de/content/an-interview-with-syrian-author-samar-yazbek-the-crossing-my-journey-to-the-shattered-heart.

Heid, H. (2016). Internally displaced Syrians facing new challenges. Heinrich Boll Stiftung. https://lb.boell.org/en/2016/06/22/internally-displaced-syrians-facing-new-challenges#:~:text=A%20large%20percentage%20of%20IDPs,violence%2C%20and%20child%20labor%20recruitment.

Hickson, A., & Wilder, C. (2023). Protecting Syrian Refugees in Turkey from Forced Repatriation. New Lines Institute. https://newlinesinstitute.org/displacement-and-migration/protecting-syrian-refugees-in-turkey-from-forced-repatriation/#:~:text=Syrians%20and%20other%20refugees%20from,province%20where%20they%20are%20registered.

Hussey, A. (n.d.) Samar Yazbek: 'Syria has been hung, drawn and quartered.' The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/28/samar-yazbek-syria-the-crossing-interview.

Khalaf, N. *et al.* (2018). *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria.* Global Literatures in Library Initiative. https://glli-us.org/2018/02/03/the-crossing-my-journey-to-the-shattered-heart-of-syria/.

Khalf, R. (2015). The Crossing, by Samar Yazbek. Financial Times. https://www.ft.com/content/f1dde746-2a0a-11e5-8613-e7aedbb7bdb7.

Levinas, E. (1985). Ethics and Infinity. Translated by Richard A. Cohen, Duquesne UP.

- - - . (1969). Totality and Infinity. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne UP.

McLoughlin K., Feigel, L., & Martin, N. (Eds.). (2017). Writing War, Writing Lives. Routledge.

Patton, M. Q. (1987). How to Use Qualitative Methods in Evaluation. SAGE Publications.

Philo. (2016). The Crossing, by Samar Yazbek. Philo on Books. https://philoonbooks.wordpress.com/2016/12/18/the-crossing-by-samar-yazbek/.

Pittaway, E. (n.d.). Making Mainstreaming a Reality – Gender and the UNHCR Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas. *Centre for Refugee Research,* 1-56. https://www.unhcr.org/4b0bb83f9.pdf.

Ranciere, J. (2004). Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man? *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 297-310.

Rehman, A. Ur. (2020). Syrian Civil War & Struggle for Survival of Assad Regime: And its impacts on wider Middle East. Lap Lambert Academic Publishing.

Samuel, W. (2012). Bare Life and Life in General. *Grey Room 46*, 7-24. https://doi.org/10.1162/grey_a_00058.

Stephenson, H. (2019). The Fall of the Berlin Wall 'Was Like Heaven on Earth'. TuftsNow. https://now.tufts.edu/articles/fall-berlin-wall-was-heaven-earth.

Syrian Civil War. (2020). Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War.

UNHCR. (2022). Internally Displaced People. https://www.unhcr.org/sy/internally-displaced-people.

UNHCR. (2021). Internally Displaced Persons, 153-200. https://www.unhcr.org/4444afce0.pdf.

United Nations. Universal Declaration Human Rights. (2015). Universal Declaration Human Rights. https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf.

Vasari, L. O., & Wang, I. C. (2015). Introduction to Life Writing and Trauma. CLCWeb: *Comparative Literature and Culture, 17*(13).

Ward, A. (Ed.). (2015). Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wilson, J. R., & Sharples, S. (Eds). (2015). *Evaluation of Human Work* (4th ed.). Taylor and Francis Group.

Yazbek, S. (2015). *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria.* Random House. - - - . (2013). *Introduction* . In; L. al-Zubaidi and M. Cassel, (eds). Writing Revolution: Voices from Tunis to Damascus. London: I.B. Tauris.

Zapata-Barrero, R. (2013). Utopian Theory and Migration without Borders. *International Journal of Social Science Studies, 1*(1), 173-183. https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.vlil.57.